

Chapter 66

How to Foster Citizen Reblogging of a Government Microblog: Evidence From Local Government Publicity Microblogs in China

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the strategies used to foster citizens' interaction with government microblogs. While government agencies are urged to adopt social media, little is known about how citizens respond to those efforts. Using data collected from the publicity microblogs of prefecture-level municipalities in China, this article indicates that government microblogs can foster citizen-initiated interaction by acquiring microblog influencers as followers, diversifying the sources of government posts and posting more multimedia content. However, regularly updating a government microblog is not necessarily associated with citizen participation.

INTRODUCTION

The potential of social media to provide a revolutionary avenue for government-citizen interaction has been addressed by both academic and popular literature (Picazo-Vela, Gutierrez-Martinez, & Luna-Reyes, 2012; Auer, Zhang, & Lee, 2014; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014). Because of its wide, easy and relatively inexpensive accessibility, social media helps government to gather input, knowledge, skills and expertise from the public and provides a new mechanism for a citizen to connect with government agencies (Thomas & Streib, 2003). It also provides a self-organizing platform for citizens to view the comments of others, share and exchange messages. Such interactivities lay the foundation for innova-

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tive ways to deliver public values, including transparency, participation, collaboration and coproduction (Linders, 2012; Mergel, 2013).

Both in China and other countries, studies on government-citizen interaction in social media seem to focus on information dissemination and interactions originating from government entities (Stamati, Papadopoulos, & Anagnostopoulos, 2015; Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Liu, Chen, & Wang, 2012; Zhou & Wang, 2013). With the purpose of enhancing transparency, government agencies are urged to post service-oriented information on social media and to use pushing, forwarding and responding techniques more frequently (Zheng & Zheng, 2014).

However, the citizen-initiated interaction has not received similar attention. The results of social media use depend not only on governments, but also citizens. Whether citizens proactively interact with governmental social media is an indication of the success and popularity of the government's online communication; it also denotes the level of citizen participation, if not collaboration, on social media platforms (Linders, 2011). For government, citizens' responses to social media posts are an extension of other official channels to receive feedback from the public and collect information for decision-making.

Some scholars have expressed optimism about the capacities of social media to enable its participative nature (Berrot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010; Olivera & Welch, 2013). The expectations are high that social media will solicit ample feedback from citizens about services and facilitate citizen participation in decision-making. However, recent empirical studies suggest that these claims made by normative rationales are contradicted by the realities of social media use. Citizens' interactive use of governmental social media is indeed quite limited. For example, Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015) demonstrated that Dutch citizens rarely use Twitter to contact the police. They primarily use the police Twitter account for informative purposes. Norris and Reddick (2013) found that the use of social media use by local governments in the U.S. is predominantly one-way communication from governments outward. Bonsón et al. (2012) found that while most EU local governments are using social media tools to enhance transparency, the use of social media to enhance dialogue and participation is still in its infancy. As researchers in public administration, the logical question we need to ask is: what methods or strategies can be used to elevate social media to its full potential in facilitating citizen connectivity with government?

To fill the research gap, this article seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Are citizens responsive to government-provided messages on social media?
2. What are the strategies that can be used to foster citizen-initiated interaction with governmental social media?

This article will proceed as follows. First, we will introduce the research context of this study, the publicity (*waixuan*) microblog of the prefectural-level municipalities in China. Based on the mission of the publicity microblog, a theoretical model will then be proposed to explain the factors that impact citizen reblogging of government-posted messages. Finally, findings and policy implications will be provided.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Specifically, this study is interested in citizens' interactive use of governmental social media within the Chinese context. One of the most influential social platforms in China-the microblog-is the focus of this study. Like other countries, Chinese government agencies are rapidly embracing social media platforms

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